

Book Reviews

Observation Points: The Visual Poetics of National Parks, edited by Thomas Patin, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012. Xxvi+296 pp., US\$27.50 (paperback), ISBN: 978-0-8166-5146-7

Observation Points presents a spry collection of essays that critically explore the “uses and functions of visual rhetoric in, around, and about national parks and the natural environment.” (p. xiii). Thomas Patin, the book’s editor and a professor of art history at Northern Arizona University, guides this volume along a theory rich path. Patin and his fellow authors draw a wide circle of “visual signifying materials and practices” (p. xiii) including landscape paintings, films, architecture, visitor publications, and physical locations such as Mount Rushmore National Monument.

Although geography is not the prime field represented in this volume, the interdisciplinary mix of authors is attractive. Book contributors hail from, art history, American studies, museum studies, political science, and geography. Additionally, the book offers a sampler platter of national parks locations across the United States such as Zion, Yellowstone, Grand Canyon, and Yosemite.

One of the key attractive and innovate aspects of this book is its specific focus on national park contexts and visual representations in a variety of mediums. *Observation Points* is divided into 13 chapters. The book begins with an introduction by Patin that situates visual rhetoric as the central concern of the volume and provides a brief review of the book chapters. Other chapters include essays about landscapes and landscape elements such as Gregory Clark’s take on architecture in Zion National Park, Peter Peters’ chapter about 1950s and 1960s national park road designs, Stephen Germic’s treatment of memorials and American Indian resistance, and Thomas Patin’s essay about Chaco Culture National Historical Park. Some essays feature photographs, paintings and films such as Sabine Wikle’s essay about American landscape paintings, geographer Gareth John’s treatment of Thomas Moran’s visual legacy in Yellowstone National Park imagery, Teresa Bergman’s exploration of Mount Rushmore’s orientation films, and Cindy Spurlock’s analysis of Ken Burns’ 2009 documentary *The National Parks*. Additional chapters use the ideas of a notable author or artist as lens to view landscape such as William Chaloupka’s chapter about Aldo Leopold and Mount Rushmore or Albert Biome’s work on George Catlin’s ideas concerning wilderness and utopia. Mark Neuman’s study of daredevil stunts and the Grand

Canyon extends and deepens the concept of performance as a form of visual rhetoric.

The 296 page book includes a variety of historic and contemporary photographs, drawings, and maps. Cultural geographers will enjoy the many field-based photographs captured by the book's contributors. Many of the authors convincingly draw on the images to clarify and strengthen their arguments. A good example of this strategy is found in Robert M. Bednar's 'Being Here, Looking There.' Bednar explores W.J.T. Mitchells' idea of landscape as "a dynamic medium" through an analysis of roads, road signs, boundary signs, visitor center displays, and scenic overlook structures. Bednar's images of Zabriskie Point in Death Valley National Park will be familiar or even ordinary to travelers who have visited this park but Bednar's clever discussion of the imagery invigorates a critical reading of this landscape as it is presented through signs and overlook locations.

Observation Points would have been improved with additional imagery and graphics. Some chapters, such as William Chaloupka's 'Thinking like a Mountain' forego the use of imagery entirely. Other chapters, such as David A. Tschida's treatment of maps, written materials, and pamphlets found in visitor centers and gift shops would have been improved with additional examples of the imagery and documents discussed in the chapter. Setting imagery concerns aside, Tschida presents an adept and innovative treatment of this relatively untapped source of popular materials for scholarly texts.

Observation Points will be a useful volume for upper division geography courses, graduate courses, and specialists focused on national parks, visual studies, and cultural landscapes.

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Tourists, Signs, and the City: The Semiotics of Culture in an Urban Landscape, by Michelle M. Metro-Roland Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012. x + 171 pp. US \$89.95 (hardback), ISBN: 978-0-7546-7809-0

The thesis of the book is that an idea of the 'tourist prosaic' is valuable in interpreting how the tourist makes meaning through the activity of being a tourist in an urban environment. The 'tourist prosaic' arises from a combination of the cityscape and the touristscape, terms Metro-Roland uses to characterise the contrast that she proposes in the activities of the tourist and the local as they undertake their activities in the same city. Metro-Roland applies Charles Peirce's semiotic theory to a close analysis

of how tourists in Budapest encounter the notion of ‘Hungarianness’ in the city’s landscape. The fieldwork involved three stages: 103 people were interviewed at popular tourist sites in Budapest; ‘visitor employed photography’ asked participants to photograph aspects of the environment that they felt conveyed ‘Hungarianness’; and 109 people were interviewed at the Central Market Hall, a location Metro-Roland puts forward as an emblem of the ‘tourist prosaic’.

This practical side of the research is introduced through Peircean semiotics, which is used as a method for explaining the interpretation of landscape in the city. The heart of Peirce’s sign system is the tripartite sign unit consisting of an object, a sign or representamen, and an interpretant. Peirce used sign and representamen to mean the same thing at different times in his writing, and Metro-Roland usefully clarifies his plentiful terminology. In the context of the tourist’s experience of interpreting Budapest as a place of Hungarianness, Metro-Roland applies Peirce’s system to analysing how tourists interpret objects in their environment and go on to act on the beliefs they have formed. Hungarianness, it is concluded, is possible to identify in the tourists’ interpretation of this particular place, and forms a part of the idea of ‘destination’ on which tourism depends: “in the end we want to feel like we have been somewhere, a destination” (p. 147).

Tourists, Signs and the City provides some discreet studies within the larger whole that may be useful to researchers: a close focus on guidebooks to the city in both English and Magyar; the introduction to Peirce’s semiotics; and a detailed ethnographic study of the Central Market Hall as a multi-functional site. More broadly, the direct application of Peircean semiotics is a useful attempt at bringing an essentially nineteenth-century philosophy into analysis of contemporary urban experience. Despite the early championing of Peirce, his theory is lost in the rush to extrapolate from tourists interpreting ‘Hungarianness’ in Budapest to people cognizing reality in general, which is then commuted to people interpreting ‘placeness’ in general. Unconvincing Peircean interpretations of signs are offered at various points in the text, for example “paprika is iconic, in real connection with the culinary life of the country” (p. 135) and “the rise of the pampered pet [is] an indexical sign of the rise in conspicuous consumption” (p. 83). It would be more useful to follow Peirce in his suggestion that “a sign can embody each of the qualities and what matters is the way in which signs function iconically, indexically, and/or symbolically rather than their ontological status as one of the types” (p. 22). This would allow more room for simultaneity of function as well as rapid changes in the context of any object of a sign (which need not be material).

The astonishing prevalence of typographical and grammatical errors presents a barrier to easy reading and leaves the impression that the reader, like the tourist-subject, is not entirely respected. We learn of the

“Finish [sic] embassy” (p. 96), that “history and culture are dominate [sic] tropes” (p. 93), that English was “spoke [sic]” (p. 79), that people go to a “stationary [sic] store” (p. 66) and that ‘Hungarianness’ has no stable spelling. Metro-Roland suggests that having read guidebooks to Budapest, “the reader is left to believe that the city is simply a depopulated collection of historic buildings and artifacts, a touristscape museum severed from the living breathing everyday city [sic]” (p. 59). This reader-tourist is ‘in a stupor’ at home in the face of the banal features of their daily life, befuddled by guidebooks, yet activated as a performer of complex sign theory when on holiday, capable of sufficient feats of interpretation that they justify generalisation into a universal theory of ‘placeness’, which is not adequately justified. The notion of the ‘tourist prosaic’ is an answer to the non-problem of the ‘contradiction’ between the cityscape and the touristscape, a contradiction founded on a sense of marvel that cities are materially, aesthetically and experientially complex.

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The Global and the Intimate: Feminism in Our Time, edited by Geraldine Pratt and Victoria Rosner, New York: Columbia University Press, 2012. 325 pp. US\$29.50 (paper), ISBN: 978-0-2311-5449-9

Feminist geographers’ investigations of the everyday intimacies of embodied subjects have been used to critique, intervene in, and retheorize abstract narratives of global processes and relations. With Elspeth Probyn, “We might call this a feminist attunement to the little details so crucial to adequately understanding the big picture” (p. 75). In their new collection, *The Global and the Intimate: Feminism in Our Time*, Geraldine Pratt and Victoria Rosner bring together feminist scholars from various disciplines concerned with this relationship between the intimate and the global. Cultural geographers will not only find this conceptual pairing fruitful for upending hegemonic notions of scale and space, but will find in each chapter examples of how an epistemological commitment to intimacy can be productively incorporated into academic research and writing.

In their introduction, Pratt and Rosner problematize “the intimate” and “the global,” reviewing the use of these concepts in feminist thought. Crucially, they insist that intertwining the global and the intimate is an ethical move attentive to specificity and broader global contexts simultaneously, and they highlight the importance of materiality (“the tastes, smells, and touch of everyday life”) in the following fifteen chapters

(p. 19). Chapter One in the first of four thematically organized sections, Ara Wilson's contribution acts as a second introduction to the collection, tracing the use of intimacy as a critical concept, and suggesting that its analytical value lies in its emphasis on relationality and linkages and its resistance to fixed definition.

That most authors are not geographers is one of the book's strengths, particularly for cultural geographers, who will certainly appreciate the diversity of methods and cultural theories applied to important geographic themes. For example, for those interested in literature, Agnese Fidecaro's piece offers a critical reading of Jamaica Kincaid's *My Garden (Book)*, arguing that it challenges a reification of the intimate to the domestic or private, and that it reveals the relationship of intimacy to global histories and forces. Geographers less interested in analyses of literature, film, or art installation will still find the chapters by Fidecaro, Mieke Bal, Marianne Hirsch, and Tsung-Yi Michelle Huang and Chi-She Li compelling for their concern with physical and emotional borders, exploration of tensions between intimacy and global forces, and attention to how objects and practices do (and do not) produce intimacy through processes of place and displacement.

Cultural geographers will also appreciate how a focus on intimacy provokes experimental research and writing. The editors solicited personal writing from Rachel Adams, Nancy K. Miller, Min Jin Lee, and Mikhal Dekel, who each provide accounts of how the intimate and the global connect in personal as well as intellectual ways, complicating and enriching life. Other contributors also incorporate personal writing in their chapters. Probyn in particular weaves together playful tales of encounters between herself, others, and oysters, with an intimate take on doing research and writing in a spirit of positivity, while also maintaining a broad and multidisciplinary review of relevant literature—from oyster ecology to sociology, geography, and social theory.

Adding more strength to the collection is its rejection of a formula for how the intimate and the global inform one another. Marisa Belausteguigoitia Rius' chapter on a collaborative mural project in a women's prison in Mexico City expounds on the importance of intimacy for survival and the opportunity to change one's story, which is applicable to struggles for justice around the world. Inderpal Grewal shows how stereotypes that rearticulate a public/private divide make the heteronormative family a key site of security and surveillance for US geopolitical designs. In their chapters, Sidonie Smith and Melissa W. Wright differently evaluate the costs of using personal witness testimony to speak to human rights abuses. The Sangtin Writers offer discussion of their experiences as a writers' collective and people's movement, focusing on the intimate and global politics of alliance work, and emphasizing the importance of intimate relationships to social critique, knowledge creation, and solidarity across space.

This is a book that advocates a new way of seeing and understanding the global that is not simplistically about attention to the local, but is about individuals, bodies, lives, connections and emotions situated in place and time. It invites cultural geographers to engage with the intimate, and in so doing, gain a conceptual tool with which to better understand the world in which we live.

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